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# The Belief Systems of Defenders: General Patterns between 1963 and 1989

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## *The Belief Systems of Defenders: General Patterns between 1963 and 1989*

Since 1957, efforts to maintain and strengthen Canada's commitments to NATO have competed with contrary efforts to restructure or de-emphasize select NATO commitments. This competition among policy-makers has been a distinguishing feature of Canada's involvement in NATO for the past forty years. Many policy-makers based their defence of Canada's NATO commitments on an interlocking set of beliefs and assumptions typical of Defenders.<sup>1</sup> These beliefs led them to support maintaining, even strengthening, Canada's NATO commitments.

### SUBSTANTIVE BELIEFS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF DEFENDERS

#### *Defenders feared abandonment*

The most important belief held by many Defenders was that the close ties among the allies would be threatened unless Canada maintained or strengthened its NATO defence commitments. If these commitments were weakened or abandoned and Canada deserted its closest allies, they feared that Canada would be in danger of being itself abandoned. These persistent concerns about the neglect of friends and allies that could result in an array of negative consequences can be grouped together as evidence of the Defenders' widespread tendency to fear abandonment.

Many Canadians harboured fears about the consequences of abandoning the NATO allies. Between 1963 and 1987, stark scenarios were frequently advanced concerning what could happen if Canada failed to nurture its military relationship with its allies. High-level discussions and correspondence throughout the period dwelt on the possibility



that equivocation by the government regarding its defence ties could threaten the Alliance's solidarity, along with Canada's interests in Europe. One high-level policy-maker wrote to the minister of External Affairs in 1969 as follows: "Unpalatable though it may be, we must recognize that the public debate on collective security and specifically on NATO that has been going on in Canada has been most unsettling to the Alliance and damaging to Canadian interests in Europe. There is need to redress the balance decisively and I fear that this will not be accomplished unless we draw a line under our national period of hesitation and resume our place in the Alliance without qualification."<sup>2</sup>

Predictions about unsettling the Alliance and damaging Canadian interests in Europe were common, as was the fear that any measure of Canadian withdrawal from Europe might lead to other threatening scenarios, such as German domestic pressures leading to "an expansion of German military strength and the development of an independent nuclear weapons capability." Indeed, senior defence officials predicted in 1968 that any weakening, or withdrawal, of Canadian support from NATO could "affect the solidarity of the Alliance out of all proportion to Canada's relative force contribution at present."<sup>3</sup>

Many Defenders also assumed that if the government withdrew Canadian Forces from Europe or shifted defence expenditures away from NATO, Canada's allies would react sharply. The Ad Hoc Committee on Defence Policy, which in 1963 reported directly to the minister of National Defence, emphasized that the consequences of withdrawing from NATO "would be a sharp reduction in Canada's stature in Europe and in Washington."<sup>4</sup> According to a high-level, secret document written five years later, Canada's image in Europe would be "damaged" if the government was to withdraw its forces from Europe: "Rightly or wrongly, the Europeans have chosen to consider our forces in Europe as an earnest of our desire for close association with them and as a symbol of our internationalist spirit. Any unilateral action to withdraw them for reasons which our Allies did not find convincing would damage that image and modify the regard in which we are held by Europeans."<sup>5</sup>

When questions arose about reducing the forces' defence expenditures in Europe, Cabinet ministers often warned that the allies would disapprove of any shift of emphasis from Europe to Canada. Mitchell Sharp, minister of External Affairs in 1969, cautioned his colleagues that our allies "would not want to do the dirty work while we do the nice things."<sup>6</sup> Some influential decision-makers emphasized that, unless Canada strengthened or maintained its NATO commitments, the country could become isolationist or neutralist or that a wave of pacifism would overtake governmental decision-making, leading to



a detachment from all allied affairs. As the Ad Hoc Defence Committee warned in 1963: "A policy of isolationism would permit Canadian defence policy to be disentangled from alliance commitments. However, the price would be that Canada's foreign policy as well as Canadian defence policy would cease to be relevant to Canadian national interests or to the contemporary world. Moreover, no feasible operation of Canadian foreign policy or Canadian defence policy can disentangle Canada from the Twentieth Century or the American continent."<sup>7</sup> Some Defenders also viewed Prime Minister Trudeau's effort in 1968-69 to withdraw, or at least reduce, Canadian Forces in Europe as indicative of a dangerous trend toward neutralism. According to Ross Campbell, Canada's ambassador to NATO at the time: "And believe me, Pierre Trudeau did not get the outcome that he had at that time wanted. He wanted the outcome to be that we would become a neutral nation. You may remember ... he envisaged that as one option, and that's where I think he wanted it to come out. And it didn't come out that way because that's not the instinct of most Canadians."<sup>8</sup>

The concern among Defenders about negative consequences if the government were to abandon NATO was not limited to the possible results of abandoning Canada's Western European allies. Many Defenders also predicted dire consequences if the country's commitments to the United States, under NATO auspices, were weakened. As Paul Hellyer, minister of National Defence during the Pearson era, told his Cabinet colleagues in 1963, "The consequences of a failure to honour Canada's nuclear commitments would be far-reaching; it might, for example, jeopardize extensive sales to the United States of the Caribou II aircraft or lead to the withdrawal of U.S. concessions on the importation of Canadian oil."<sup>9</sup> According to the minutes of another Cabinet meeting six years later, "consideration would have to be given to the possibility of an adverse reaction in the United States to any reduction in military expenditures." As the president of the Treasury Board saw it, "United States authorities, while granting that we had freedom to choose military roles, were always concerned as to the relative size of the burden that Canada was assuming." Another minister pointed out that the Cabinet was drawing conclusions based on the possibility of fearful consequences, the reality of which Postmaster-General Eric Kierans seriously questioned. Other Cabinet ministers, including Minister of External Affairs Mitchell Sharp and Minister of National Defence Leo Cadieux, nevertheless continued to insist that there would be grave consequences if the government chose to de-emphasize its NATO defence commitments to the United States.<sup>10</sup>



Dire consequences were also predicted whenever the question of neutrality or non-alignment arose. If Canada decided to pursue neutrality, the argument went, "the USA could find that the penalty to its security interests was intolerable."<sup>11</sup> According to a secret intradepartmental report presented to Cabinet in 1969, the Americans

could not tolerate the military use of Canadian territory by any power deemed hostile to us interests, and they would, therefore, undoubtedly meet with armed force – perhaps even without invitation – any attempt at the invasion, occupation or subjection of Canada ... [Non-alignment could] increase Canada's exposure to the indirect threat of foreign subversion ... [and] tend to introduce an element of instability into the strategic nuclear balance, i) because it would impose a penalty on the USA by denying access to Canadian territory and air space needed for the defence of us territory and the protection of the us strategic retaliatory forces, and ii) because a non-aligned Canada would interpose between the USA and the USSR a large geographical area of defence concern to both, but which would be an unknown political quantity in times of international tension.<sup>12</sup>

Many Defenders also cautioned that Canada might face difficult problems with the United States if the government did not agree to American requests to store or test nuclear weapons systems in Canada. In 1966, for example, Minister of External Affairs Paul Martin warned that the government had to agree to store nuclear weapons at the US-leased Argentia base in Newfoundland because "a nuclear capability at Argentia is considered by the US to be a highly desirable increment of deterrence to missile attack on North America ... Should we reject this request we would be likely to face some difficult problems. A rejection would be taken very seriously by the US ... It would also add an important new item to the list of current Canadian positions about which Washington is unhappy, whereas a favourable decision could help to offset adverse US reaction on such matters as the Soviet air agreement."<sup>13</sup>

Over the past four decades, many Defenders have warned as well that the government had to maintain, if not strengthen, its commitments to the North American defence system in order to avoid encroachment and excessive control by the United States. As a senior adviser argued in 1964, "our sovereign control" and "the durability of the French-English partnership" could depend on strengthened military commitments to North America: "In terms of our continuing relations with the US, there is an urgent political need to maintain Canada's contribution to North American defence at the highest



possible level, especially when our sovereign control over other elements of our society and economy are under heavy us pressure. The durability of the French-English partnership in Confederation may well be dependent in part on our ability to resist us encroachment in all fields, including military."<sup>14</sup> Another high-level memorandum in 1968 advised that any reduction in Canada's military commitments could provoke the United States into making arbitrary decisions about Canadian defence policy:

Certainly substantial reductions in air defence and maritime defence could have grave repercussions on our bilateral relations with the us. It would be strongly resisted by the us because it would affect their own security. To compensate for the loss of us security, Canada would be pressed to agree to free access to Canadian air space and facilities for us air defence forces and accept us assumption of operational control of the ocean approaches to Canada. In both cases, but especially in the case of air defence, such a situation would involve stationing substantial numbers of us military personnel in Canada. At the same time, the USA would be making vital decisions affecting Canada's security and in a context which would have removed the incentive for close and easy consultation and exchange of information which Canadian participation in North American defence creates.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to worrying about the need to resist American encroachment and American control over Canadian decision-making, many Defenders projected the fear that if Canada were to weaken or withdraw its military commitments to NATO, the United States could slide into isolationism. Some Cabinet ministers argued in 1969 that if Canada withdrew from NATO, "this would be a plus for isolationism in the us" and would affect Canada's interest "in the preservation of western civilization."<sup>16</sup> In that same year, other Defenders expressed concern that many facets of Canada's political, economic, and defence relationship with the United States could dissipate if Ottawa were to weaken its NATO commitments. According to Marcel Cadieux, under-secretary of state for External Affairs in 1969, "Even if Canada were prepared to ignore its own security, it could not ignore the u.s.a.'s security interests; otherwise the u.s. would be pressed to take unilateral steps which would deny us the advantages we derived from co-operation and would at the same time threaten our autonomy."<sup>17</sup> Similarly, another high-level restricted memorandum written in 1984 stated: "Should our support of NORAD (and NATO) decline, Canada could lose lucrative business to our 'more committed' Allies. Any reduction in our contribution



might spill over to other segments of the bilateral relationship. USA trade policy, protectionism, environmental and broad political issues could be influenced by our attitudes towards defence relations."<sup>18</sup>

A related theme put forward by Defenders was that of the danger of Canada no longer being treated as a full partner, and the government not being consulted by the allies. According to the intradepartmental "Defence Policy Review" prepared for Cabinet in 1969: "The termination of Canadian defence co-operation with the USA and Western Europe would mean that Canada would no longer be participating in the formulation of Western policies on such matters as European security and disarmament, and that Western governments would regard Canada as essentially an outsider which no longer saw political interests in common with them. The result would be a decline in the hearing which Canada was able to obtain for its views in Western capitals, even if those views, in Canadian eyes, continued to have intrinsic merit."<sup>19</sup> Another senior policy-maker in External Affairs wrote his minister in 1969 that Canada's voice would be respected only if it fully cooperated with, and remained a reliable member of, NATO: "For Canada, this means in simple terms that it is only through continued participation in NATO that we can be sure of being part of a future process which is certainly going to alter profoundly the world scene over the next decade. But it also means that our voice in that process will be a respected one only if we are a fully cooperating and reliable member of the sole organization which is to be an integral part of the United States' far-reaching experiment in direct negotiation with the USSR."<sup>20</sup>

Defenders assumed that Canada needed to participate fully in NATO military activities in order to be regarded by the allies as a full partner. They also pointed out that the government, by weakening its military commitments to NATO, would lose its "seat at the table" in NATO discussions and have little say on decisions of great importance. In 1968, defence experts advised the Special Task Force on Europe that the government's ability to participate in the formulation of the nuclear policies of the Alliance would be threatened if Canadian forces in NATO should no longer be equipped with nuclear weapons: "Nuclear matters lie at the core of NATO strategy and there is no logic to the claim that Canada would somehow be better off if it dissociated itself from the decisions that must in any case be taken. Any decision to withdraw from the nuclear role in Europe simply on moral grounds would be difficult to justify."<sup>21</sup> More than two decades later, other high-level policy-makers continued to assume that "it's really by having had forces in Europe that we are a player in this business."<sup>22</sup> According to Paul Dick, associate minister of National

Defence in 1988 and a strong advocate of increasing Canada's commitments to the Alliance: "It is the leader of the NATO group who squares off with the leader of the Warsaw Pact group. If we did not have that seat at the NATO table, then we would have no more voice than many other countries in this world who do not even participate in discussions about disarmament and arms control."<sup>23</sup>

The fear that the allies would abandon Canada was also expressed in the notion that the Europeans might cut trade links if the government decided to withdraw from Europe, or that the United States might cease to grant Canada preferential trading status if Canada chose to reduce its military commitments. According to a secret memorandum circulated in 1968 in the Department of External Affairs:

Our refusal to cooperate in continental defence would cause serious concern to the USA authorities and USA public opinion, and would adversely affect the USA's attitude towards economic cooperation with us. We would incur heavy direct costs through the termination of the USA-Canada defence production sharing agreements; as indirect costs, our present exports of oil and natural gas and potential exports of uranium to the US might be affected, as well as our trade in such commodities as copper scrap, potash, lead, zinc, etc. The US authorities might be considerably less inclined to make mutually beneficial special arrangements with us in the financial field (eg. the interest equalization tax) or to enter into new areas of cooperation similar to the Auto Parts agreement. In summary, there could in the long term be extremely serious adverse consequences for our economy.<sup>24</sup>

Still other decision-makers were wary of the dangers of abandonment because they had witnessed previous allied reaction to reductions in Canada's defence spending. As one high-level official recalled in 1982, "Canada's decision to reduce our contingent in Europe in the early 1970s was criticized on the grounds that we were weakening NATO's strength in Europe. Subsequently, we continued to draw criticism because of the low percentage of our GNP spent on defence, compared to most other members of the Alliance."<sup>25</sup> In particular, the allies' criticism of Canada's failure to meet the pledge to devote three percent of GNP to real growth in the defence budget alerted some decision-makers to the possibility that there could be future negative consequences if Canada did not meet its NATO commitments.<sup>26</sup> As a senior adviser wrote Michael Pitfield in the PCO in 1980:

Canada's defence effort has been severely criticized recently, particularly by the US, in the annual multilateral examination in NATO's Defence Review



Committee. I think we may expect Mr. Vance to raise the subject in critical terms when he visits Ottawa later this month ... I thought I should draw this criticism to your attention because of my concern at the adverse effect in foreign policy terms that a failure by Canada to make every effort to achieve the 3% real growth in defence expenditures will have, particularly in Washington, but also among our major NATO allies.<sup>27</sup>

Aside from the idea that the allies might punish Canada for reducing its military commitments, some Defenders emphasized the possibility that a Canada estranged from NATO would be left alone with its great neighbour to the south. The domination of Canadian defence and foreign policy by the United States would inevitably result. Another ambassador to NATO, Arthur Menzies, argued that "there was an advantage to Canada being in a larger organization with a number of others rather than in a position which would have been as unequal as a Canada/United States type of organization."<sup>28</sup> According to another Defender, Ross Campbell, one of the "absolutely deadly" consequences of the growth of "the European centre within NATO" was that Canada would be "left on the shelf with the Americans."<sup>29</sup> One way to avoid this outcome, he later argued, was for Canada to commit to NATO, not reduce or withdraw its overseas military commitments.

Along with their fears of abandonment, some Defenders occasionally worried that the United States, in a fit of pique over any Canadian decision to withdraw from NATO, might abruptly cease consulting with Canada on other defence issues and renegotiate its defence agreements with Canada. As Marcel Cadieux, the deputy minister of External Affairs in 1969, pointed out in a secret memorandum to his minister, if Canada chose to become non-aligned, the United States would have to abrogate various defence agreements with Canada, and the process of disengagement would "be extremely acrimonious and also expensive in terms of trade in defence-related items and in terms of possible US compensation claims against Canada."<sup>30</sup> In the opinion of another high-level policy-maker in 1966, the capacity and willingness of the United States to share in the burden of providing "global security" could be "circumscribed" by Canada's unwillingness to share the defence burden. As he saw it, there would be "new strains" in Canada's relations with the US if Canada "faltered" in any significant way.<sup>31</sup>

The important message underlying all these warnings about the consequences of not fulfilling the government's NATO commitments was that, unless the government strengthened, or at least maintained,



its NATO commitments, Canada risked abandoning its allies and being itself abandoned. Many high-level decision-makers who pressed the government to strengthen or maintain its NATO commitments had a strong tendency, both publicly and behind the scenes, to project fearsome images and threatening scenarios related to the dire consequences of abandonment.

*Defenders believed that Canada should pursue closer ties to the allies through established kinds of military commitments*

Although Canadian decision-makers have suggested a variety of ways to pursue closer ties in the NATO Alliance, the tendency among Defenders was to consider only traditional, and established ways of fostering such ties. Established means of pursuing closer ties included commitments to maintain or increase the number of Canadian Forces personnel earmarked for NATO purposes, particularly those deployed in Europe, as well as promises to modernize or designate more weapons systems and equipment to Canadian Forces in NATO, particularly in Europe. Traditional ways of signalling Canada's allegiance to the allies also included commitments to maintain or increase the percentage of the federal government's defence budget or the percentage of GNP directed toward the defence of the Alliance.

To a great extent, those who believed that Canada should contribute to NATO by such traditional means held long-established opinions as to how the nation should participate in the Alliance. During World War II and the Korean War, the United States and Canada were the only allied countries capable of providing Western Europe with military forces, equipment, and money. These traditionalists seemed to assume that maintaining Canada's overseas commitments was the most appropriate method of signalling its intention to support friends and allies.<sup>32</sup> As John Holmes later explained, the perception that Canada had performed as a great military power during World War II persisted, contributing to the view that Canada should continue to make commitments to NATO concomitant with being a great power.<sup>33</sup> This conviction was reinforced by the fact that Soviet and Warsaw Pact troops continued to be stationed along the Central Front. Although written references to this threat were infrequent, the general assumption among Defenders continued to be that Canadian troops were in Europe to help deter a Soviet attack from behind the Iron Curtain and, if war broke out, to assist in keeping it below the nuclear threshold. As explained in a paper written in 1969 by DND officials for the Special Task Force on Europe:



Canadian participation in collective defence arrangements with European allies essentially serves the purpose of helping to minimize the risk of U.S./USSR conflict or, if it breaks out, helping to contain it below the level of an all-out nuclear exchange. Since the formation of the NATO Alliance in 1949 the risk of a deliberate all-out assault by the USSR on the West has greatly receded. But as long as settlement of European political problems is lacking, particularly over Germany, and as long as formidable armed forces continue to be massed in Eastern Europe, there is a major risk of great-power conflict by accident or miscalculation.<sup>34</sup>

Established ideas about how Canada could help deter the threat dominated, too, because Canadians kept in touch with other NATO decision-makers who continued to assume that the defence of Western Europe was of utmost importance.<sup>35</sup> That the allies still considered Canada's forces and equipment stationed overseas as the most appropriate type of commitment Canada could make to NATO was sometimes a source of frustration, but for the most part Defenders accepted it. As Mitchell Sharp explained to the Cabinet Committee on External Policy and Defence in 1969:

The majority of observers agree that the Soviet Union would use its nuclear force only as a last resort. It would not be employed in a premeditated sense. Rather the real possibility [exists] that a miscalculation or accident would change the balance of power in Europe and thereby a local conflict, once it began, could escalate into a nuclear confrontation. The military role of western powers [is] to contain that local conflict and to manage any possible crisis that might exist. The contribution of conventional forces [is] most significant in this context. The presence of our military force in Europe also [serves] as a warning to the Soviet empire that Canada [is] committed to the struggle for the peaceful resolution of European problems. Our men must be stationed there as evidence of our intentions and our commitment.<sup>36</sup>

It is noteworthy that the defence of Canada was not widely regarded as a NATO priority. According to another high-level confidential source in 1984:

[Our European allies] simply do not accept the idea that, in the nuclear age, North America is as vulnerable as Europe, or that Canada, lying between the superpowers, risks becoming [a] no-man's-land in a nuclear war. These are notions that stir Canadian imaginations powerfully. Europeans, however, are convinced that it is they who are in the front line, and that it is still Europe which is far the more vulnerable. To them, North America is a sanctuary, even in the nuclear age, and Canada one of the safest places in the world.



When we commit forces in places our allies see as specially vulnerable – in Germany or northern Norway – we make a commitment that is immediately understood. A commitment in North America – even justified as part of a larger and arguably more rational contribution to the general defence of the North Atlantic region – would carry nothing like the same weight ...<sup>37</sup>

Defenders generally conceded, without any detailed argument, that the military alternatives to stationing the forces overseas would be less effective than the current arrangements, and that objections could be raised to other alternatives. For example, according to the "Defence Policy Review" of 1969:

Since it is generally conceded that the likelihood of being able to redeploy the force from Canada in time to be of military use in Europe is small ... objections could be raised at the time that the deployment of the force would serve to add to international tensions ... this alternative would not be cheaper and could well be considerably more expensive than the current cost of the mechanized brigade ... [and] it has already been argued that for the present without some form of military contribution stationed in Europe Canada would not be regarded by its allies as making an appropriate contribution to NATO.<sup>38</sup>

Similarly in 1984 the Defence Evaluation Group assumed that Canada had no option but to maintain its CAST commitment to Norway, because the CAST Brigade had always been a purely Canadian commitment:

Reaction of our Alliance partners to any unilateral redeployment of Canadian forces from the CAST commitment to Northern Europe must be viewed in light of the question – who would be willing to take over Canada's commitment? The answer lies in why Canada is involved with CAST to begin with. The CAST Brigade is a purely Canadian commitment for a number of reasons. The USA would not be accepted because of their high profile; the West Germans would not be tolerated because of historical circumstance, while the Belgians, Dutch and Danes all have political and economic problems of their own. Thus, should Canada withdraw the CAST commitment, a gap could occur in Northern European defence strategy.<sup>39</sup>

A number of important advisory groups (such as the Cabinet Committee on External Policy and Defence; the Ad Hoc Committee on Defence Policy, 1963; the intragovernmental Defence Policy Review, 1969; the Special Task Force on Europe, STAFEUR study, 1969; the Defence Studies Review Steering Group, 1972; and the Defence Evaluation Group, 1984) were tasked to consider alternatives to stationing



Canadian Forces in Europe. The general tendency, however, was to reaffirm conventional wisdom and make the case for maintaining the status quo. As noted by the Ad Hoc Committee on Defence Policy:

Withdrawal of Canada's participation in the defence of Europe would lead logically to the withdrawal of Canadian forces from Europe and their disbandment. The principal attraction in this course of action is the potential saving in costs. The principal disadvantage is in the reduction in Canada's stature and influence within NATO. In this respect there can be no possible room for illusion. There is no alternative role for Canada, military or non-military, which could serve as a comparable support of Canadian diplomacy.<sup>40</sup>

In keeping with the tendency to argue that Canada should maintain if not strengthen its traditional commitments to European defence, Defenders also assumed that Canada should strive to meet NATO's goal of three-percent annual real growth in defence spending. Although this was a general assumption, behind the scenes there was ongoing controversy about how to measure, fairly, the percentage of a country's GNP devoted to NATO.<sup>41</sup> A major consideration was that the allies, particularly the United States, could criticize a Canadian shortfall in defence spending. According to one secret memorandum written in 1968, the American attitude toward Canada "would be influenced by their conviction that with the US spending 10% of its National Income on defence, Canada should certainly be able to continue to spend at least 3% of its GNP."<sup>42</sup> As another influential Defender saw it in 1974:

By the traditional criteria used by NATO, Canada is already making one of the most modest contributions to collective defence of an Alliance country (e.g. we are amongst the lowest in terms of GNP devoted to defence and the proportion of the overall budget devoted to defence). This situation and the fact that our own inflationary problems are not as severe as in some other countries would lead our allies to look with considerable concern at any decision by the Canadian government to reduce the level of the Canadian defence program particularly if it would affect adversely our military capacity.<sup>43</sup>

Similarly in 1980, a high-level official warned the under-secretary of External Affairs that the "failure of Canada to achieve the minimal NATO goal of a 3% annual real growth would undoubtedly have negative effects in foreign policy terms, particularly in our relations with the US and our major European allies".<sup>44</sup> Also, according to a Canadian ambassador in 1980: "If we do not meet these obligations (i.e. 3% increase in real terms of defence spending), of course, the



Government could count on it that it will be under persistent institutionalized pressure to do so within the framework of NATO, as well as bilaterally. We can expect also, as in the past, that our principal allies – who are also our principal economic partners – will not fail to relate our performance as a military ally to other aspects of our relations with them.”<sup>45</sup> In other words, an important concern of many Defenders was that the allies could severely criticize the government if it failed to meet the three-percent goal.<sup>46</sup>

A review of these documents and statements reveals that three streams of thought on Canada's traditional commitments to NATO developed among Defenders in the higher echelons of defence policy-making.<sup>47</sup> The *first stream* assumed that Canada's traditional contribution of forces, equipment, and money to defend Western Europe was of key importance to the continuing function of the Alliance. A memorandum written for the minister of External Affairs to use in Cabinet in 1969 instructed him to emphasize that “the Canadian contribution is certainly not insignificant and our air component ranks fourth in size and striking power after the U.S., U.K. and Germany. To believe that our departure would cause barely a ripple would be to underestimate seriously the weakening of NATO defences which would result from our withdrawal.”<sup>48</sup> This first-stream assumption could be likened to the propensity among humans to see our own behaviour as central to the behaviour of others.<sup>49</sup>

In a somewhat different fashion, the *second stream of thought* assumed that the Alliance's overall conventional balance in Western Europe would help prevent war and potentially affect the outcome of war. A high-level correspondent in 1969 emphasized that if Canada were to shift its conventional defence effort to North America, its role in preventing war would be almost entirely removed. It would also

remove us entirely from any active role in preventing war where it is most likely to ignite and expand into global war (Europe) ... [T]he defence of North America is impossible and therefore defence activities in that theatre are by their nature either only damage-limiting in character or a marginal contribution to protection of deterrent forces in the USA. It should be brought out [in the STAFEUR report] that our contribution to North American defence is largely an exercise in sovereign protection against USA encroachment rather than a major contribution to deterring the Soviet Union.<sup>50</sup>

Such a second-stream assumption – that the overall balance of conventional forces in Europe would both prevent and affect the outcome of war – seems similar to the military thinking that predated the nuclear era.<sup>51</sup>



On the other hand, a *third stream of thought* among Defenders took for granted that, given the strategic nuclear balance, Canada's military commitments to NATO made no great difference, being important only insofar as they signalled a unified resolve and Alliance solidarity. In 1963, the Ad Hoc Committee on Defence Policy pointed out that if Canada were to undertake only those programs "which were demonstrably essential to Western security or to the maintenance of distinctively Canadian interests," the Canadian Forces in Europe could be disbanded, the Royal Canadian Navy could be reduced to a coastguard, and the present defence budget could be reduced by at least fifty percent. However, according to this committee, "the adverse consequence would be to diminish Canada's international stature and to place severe strains upon Canada's relations with the USA."<sup>52</sup> As well, a restricted memo written in 1984 by senior defence officials pointed out that, although Canada's military contribution to NATO made no real difference, it was important in terms of signalling unified Alliance resolve. As high-level defence officials put it, "While the Canadian strategic contribution to the Eastern flank of NATO is small, the Warsaw Pact could use the issue [of redeployment to Canada] to their own political ends, namely that the Alliance was losing its political will to defend itself."<sup>53</sup> The conviction that Canada's contribution to NATO was symbolically important albeit insignificant, was most succinctly expressed by Ross Campbell: "Sure we can't save NATO with our contribution, or change the balance with the Soviet bloc with our little contribution to the Armed Forces, but make no mistake, they are of vital consequence to the coherence of this thing, to the solidarity of NATO."<sup>54</sup>

These three streams of thinking tended to assume that Canada should maintain or strengthen its ties to the allies by committing itself to acquiring additional forces, modernizing or strengthening weapons systems, and increasing its financial resources for NATO defence purposes. In addition, some Defenders promoted traditional commitments that appeared to strengthen Alliance ties without assessing the strategic rationale or implications of these commitments. There is evidence, for example, that some ministers in Pearson's Cabinet were initially prepared to negotiate a further agreement – to acquire "anti-submarine weapons" (the "fifth commitment") – into the general agreement concerning nuclear warheads. When it was pointed out that it was unclear if an original commitment had been made to obtain these weapons and if there was a strategic requirement for air-dropped anti-submarine nuclear weapons in the near future, Prime Minister Pearson suggested instead that the "Annex" stipulating the scope of the proposed agreement and the naming of the weapons be dropped, in favour of a paragraph referring merely to weapons and



weapons systems "as specified by agreement between the two countries from time to time." The Cabinet agreed.<sup>55</sup>

Other evidence that decision-makers sometimes did not assess the purported strategic purpose of different weapons systems is found in the Trudeau Cabinet's discussions. Faced with the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia, the ministers considered whether the strength of the Air Division should be decreased to 88 aircraft, as previously announced, or maintained at 108. They discussed, at length, the allies' possible reaction to a reduction as opposed to the political consequences of a reaffirmation of this commitment. Only near the end of their discussion did Paul Hellyer, then minister of Transport, draw attention to the strategic purpose of the aircraft. In the larger context of the Cabinet's debate, however, Hellyer's assessment was inconsequential. Indeed, most ministers were concerned with whether the contemplated reduction would damage Canada's relationship with the allies or whether maintaining the CF-104s at their present level would increase tensions.<sup>56</sup>

At times, then, decision-makers espoused some types of weapons systems and force structures as appropriate commitments to NATO with no real appreciation of their strategic purpose. Although these types of endorsements could be attributed to ignorance or even disingenuity, they also reveal that the beliefs of some Defenders about the need to maintain and strengthen Alliance ties were sometimes so thoroughly entrenched that no strategic rationale was needed to support a particular commitment.<sup>57</sup>

*Defenders believed the external threat to the Alliance  
was opportunistic and aggressive*

A decision-maker's *perception of threat* is defined here as the anticipation of impending harm to the state, usually of a military, economic, or political kind. Any event, series of incidents, or statement that is (or is not) deliberately communicated can spark a leader's anticipation of future harm to the state. Although the perceived threat may be neither real nor credible, a decision-maker's interpretation can be highly influential.<sup>58</sup>

From 1949 to 1960, many Defenders perceived the external threat to the Alliance as an aggressive, monolithic bloc.<sup>59</sup> As Arthur Menzies, a former ambassador to NATO and head of the Defence Liaison Division in External Affairs later explained:

I think at that time it was the natural approach for people like Mr. St. Laurent and Mr. Pearson to talk about global Communism as a movement across Eurasia. And certainly when the Communists took power in China, just



before the outbreak of war in Korea, it looked as if there was a certain monolithic unity and that unity did remain for the first ten years or so until the Soviets probably overreached themselves or the Chinese got more conscious of their own particular national interests which they decided they wanted to defend.<sup>60</sup>

During this period, Defenders tended to believe that the threat was to the Alliance's very stability. As Air Marshall Hugh Campbell cautioned the RCAF Staff College in 1960, there was "little hope of the Communists departing from their avowed aim of world domination and of keeping the international pot boiling." He called it "the practice for the past generation," saying there is "little hope of change."<sup>61</sup>

Over the 1960s, the idea of a monolithic threat to the Alliance took on a mythic stature that most Defenders recognized as not entirely based on reality. Despite a growing recognition that the Communist threat was divided and diffuse, the Defenders tended to continue to project an image of the Communist world as a unified, aggressive bloc. Among individual Defenders, the external threat was referred to variously as "Soviet Russia,"<sup>62</sup> "the Soviet Empire,"<sup>63</sup> "Soviet Imperialism,"<sup>64</sup> "Communism,"<sup>65</sup> and "the Communist camp"<sup>66</sup> or "East European national forces."<sup>67</sup> The threat, moreover, appeared in various guises and phrasings. The labelling included: "Marxist-Leninism as a rationale and blueprint for revolution,"<sup>68</sup> "the danger of Europe being overturned by Communists,"<sup>69</sup> "the power of the Soviet armed forces,"<sup>70</sup> "Soviet expansionist aims,"<sup>71</sup> "the possibility of a spillover of internal unrest in Warsaw Pact countries,"<sup>72</sup> and "the self-appointed leader of an international revolutionary movement."<sup>73</sup> The common tendency, however, was to perceive an aggressive challenge to the Alliance, one relentlessly bent on expansion.<sup>74</sup>

At times it was difficult to discern whether policy-makers viewed this threat as opportunistic and aggressive or whether they were merely projecting its continued existence. According to Paul Martin, minister of External Affairs in 1967, the Russians were continuing to develop their already formidable military power, despite improved relations with the West: "We cannot be sure that their earlier appetite for expansion would not revive if NATO were to lower its defences."<sup>75</sup> And as Marcel Cadieux, under-secretary of state for External Affairs, stated in 1969: "The prospect for long-term improvement in relations with the USSR [is] promising. But it [has] not yet happened. While the communist countries [are] taking steps to make themselves more acceptable, they [have] not abandoned their basic objective of supplanting Western influence around the world."<sup>76</sup> During the 1980s, many high-level decision-makers continued to decry the aggressive



and opportunistic threat posed by the Soviet Union. According to Perrin Beatty, minister of National Defence in 1987, it was imperative that countries work collectively to face the common peril: "In two world wars and in Korea we built an honourable reputation for pulling more than our weight when called upon to defend our way of life, our national institutions and our democratic values. It is perhaps difficult for some to accept that these values remain under threat today. But they are, and these threats are not uniquely ours. We cannot defend this vast country against possible enemies on our own. We must seek our security through collective measures with other nations who face the common threat."<sup>77</sup> And the 1987 Defence White Paper *Challenge and Commitment: A Defence Policy for Canada* contained the following warning:

Since the end of the Second World War, the Soviet Union has persistently expanded its military power. At the expense of the civilian economy, it has devoted vast resources to its armed forces. The result is a military establishment that has reached rough parity with the United States in strategic weapons while maintaining numerical superiority over Allied conventional forces in Europe. During the same period, it has transformed its fleet from a defensive coastal force to a powerful navy with global reach. The Soviet Union has further increased its military potential through its sponsorship and dominance of the Warsaw Pact.<sup>78</sup>

The tendency toward repeated confirmation of the existence of an aggressive threat led some decision-makers to reject any evidence that challenged their fundamental assumptions about the Soviet Union. The 1963 Ad Hoc Defence Committee, for example, condemned "the recent tendency" in Canada "to err in the direction of underestimating the threat of Soviet imperialism" and to mistakenly believe that "Soviet policy aims to avoid general war." In the committee's view, to underestimate the existence of this threat was a "profound error" because "the aims of Soviet policy are imperialistic ... [as] has been true of nearly every great empire since the world began."<sup>79</sup> Similarly, Robert Ford, long-time Canadian ambassador to Moscow, explained privately in 1969 that although "few observers would claim that the Soviet Union by design would unleash a nuclear attack," there were "few restraints on the use of Soviet military power for political ends." As he saw it, "dialogue with Soviet Government officials on issues affecting the supremacy of their authority" was "in essence a dialogue with the deaf."<sup>80</sup>

Indeed, the tendency of some Defenders to reject evidence that contradicted their convictions about the nature of the threat continued



into the 1980s and 1990s. According to a confidential dispatch from a high-level Canadian policy-maker in 1984, "prudent Western planning" had to assume that "whatever rulers came to power in the Soviet Union" would "probably look on their foreign policy interest in Europe in a traditional way." As the dispatch explained, "In the immediate future, there is no prospect of progress in East-West relations, certainly not of a kind that would radically alter the political context in Europe ..."<sup>81</sup> Even as late as 1988, the associate minister of National Defence indicated a similar tendency to reject evidence that contradicted his strong convictions:

In the last two years we have had *glasnost* and a seeming willingness by the Soviet Union to change. We welcome it and hope it is sincere, continuing and long-lasting. We all want to work towards achieving peace in the world. They have also made other comments here and there which look good on the surface. One of them of course concerns the zone of peace in the Arctic. They made much comment about northern Scandinavia, the North Atlantic and other areas, but did not make reference to their own areas. Of course they have a great mass of military might in their Arctic. It seems they wanted to have us lay down our arms but keep their Arctic areas fully armed.<sup>82</sup>

Although by this time other decision-makers were rethinking their imagery of the external threat to the Alliance, Perrin Beatty, Paul Dick, and other senior defence policy-makers continued to conceive of the Soviet threat as aggressive and opportunistic.<sup>83</sup>

*Defenders assumed both Canada's and the Alliance's weapons  
were necessary and non-threatening*

Defenders tended to downplay Canada's capabilities and to regard NATO's weapons systems and intentions as defensive, not offensive. Although others criticized some NATO weapons as being potential first-strike systems, Defenders usually portrayed Canada and the Alliance's weapons systems as part of a second-strike deterrent.

As this study focuses on the psychological rather than the operational milieu, questions about whether Canada and the other allied countries actually possessed offensive or defensive weapons are unimportant. What is important is whether the leaders, themselves, regarded Canada and the Alliance's weapons as non-threatening and defensive.

Most public debate during the Cold War focused on just one dimension of the opposition between nuclear (offensive) and conventional (defensive) arms. But weapons can be distinguished as offensive or defensive with reference to both the perceived capabilities of



the systems and the subjective motivations that may be attached to them. In other words, the best judge of whether a system is offensive or defensive is the possible target of the system, the adversary, just as we, in self-defence, would be the best judge of the adversary's offensive or defensive weapons systems. However, the distinguishing of offensive versus defensive weapons can also be done based on geographical terms. Thus, if a weapon can be effectively used abroad, on the adversary's territory, it is labelled "offensive"; if it can be used at home once an attack has taken place, it is labelled "defensive." The offensive/defensive distinction can also be based on the weapon's range variables (e.g., immobile, local, limited versus extensive, long, highly mobile) or impact variables (e.g., high explosive, weapon of mass destruction, chemical, toxic, biological, nuclear), or whether it is strategic or tactical. For example, a weapon capable of reaching the enemy's homeland or attacking deep behind its echelons might be classified as strategic and offensive, whereas a weapon that operates on or close to the battlefield might be conceived of as tactical and defensive.<sup>84</sup> From a perusal of the records of Cabinet meetings and high-level debates, however, it would appear that most Canadian leaders made no subtle distinctions between offensive and defensive weapons, whether on objective grounds or in terms of commonly accepted technical definitions. Rather the tendency of Defenders was simply to assume that Canada and the Alliance's weapons systems were defensive.

For many years the Canadian CF-104 strike reconnaissance aircraft deployed in Europe were represented as non-threatening components of a defensive strategy. In 1959, when the minister of National Defence directed that Canada acquire nuclear-armed strike reconnaissance aircraft to help "penetrate the area between the combat zone and the Russian border for reconnaissance and for strikes on targets of opportunity such as advancing columns of troops," Defence Minister Pearkes maintained that "such action would only be taken after hostile ground forces had commenced operations in western Europe." As Pearkes explained, "To prevent the overrunning of NATO Europe it would be essential to defeat enemy forces launching such an attack."<sup>85</sup> From Pearkes's perspective, these weapons were defensive and non-threatening.

During the 1960s, questions arose in Canada about whether the Starfighters could be perceived by the Soviets as first-strike weapons, inasmuch as they were capable of departing before hostilities had begun so as to locate and attack targets on the ground. Pierre Trudeau incited a furor within the Departments of National Defence and External Affairs in 1968 when he asked whether the government should rethink the role of Canada's Air Division in Europe precisely



because it could be perceived by the Soviet Union as instrumental in a first-strike scenario. Indeed, Trudeau asked a audience of Liberals in 1969:

And has the scenario ever been explained to you, to the Canadian people, as to under what conditions our aircraft would fly nuclear weapons and unleash them on Europe? Will it only be as a second strike, will it only be as a deterrent? Are these 104s, are they soft targets? In the eyes of the Soviets, in the eyes of the Warsaw Pact countries, are they not entitled to ask themselves: "Well, what are these 104s flown by Canadians going to serve? Are they going to be first strike or second strike? ... They are soft targets, they are on the ground, we know where the airfields are. Isn't it likely that they might be used to attack us first?" These are the questions that our enemies, the Soviets, are asking themselves.<sup>86</sup>

Despite such questions, high-level officials continued to conceptualize the CF-104s as second-strike, defensive weapons. According to a secret 1968 memo advising Prime Minister Trudeau to phase out these aircraft, "public questioning of our forces in Europe has focused particularly on the strike aircraft. This aircraft which has a nuclear attack capability might be expected to be an early target of pre-emptive attack in a war and is, therefore, not likely to be a particularly effective weapon."<sup>87</sup> Thus, even as Trudeau was considering phasing out the strike aircraft, his advisers were not acknowledging the prime minister's argument that the CF-104s could be perceived as an offensive weapons system.<sup>88</sup> Until Trudeau succeeded in phasing out the nuclear components of these aircraft in 1971, most defence advisers continued to present the nuclear-armed CF-104s as entirely defensive.

The extent to which some Canadian decision-makers downplayed the Alliance's nuclear capabilities is also noteworthy. In the 1950s and 1960s, many Defenders "conventionalized" the Alliance's own nuclear weapons by presenting them as usable weapons capable of defending allied soil. As Lieutenant General Charles Belzile (ret.) recalls: "We tended to look at nuclear weapons with a certain amount of awe, but we considered that training and planning for their use, and defending against them, on the tactical side, in the case of the army particularly, was a very logical and a very necessary extension of our training ... We didn't have an all-pervasive fear of nuclear weapons, in my memory, in those days."<sup>89</sup> Such portrayals of the allies' nuclear weapons systems as capable of protecting and safeguarding allied territory, rather than as instruments of war that threatened to destroy both sides' terrain, occasionally led to undue faith in the Alliance's nuclear capabilities. According to a 1965 secret



memorandum for the proposed "NATO Working Group on Nuclear Planning," the allied forces under NATO command "would be entirely incapable of protecting the countries of Western Europe against a Soviet attack" if not for the fact that they were backed by the "strategic power of the us" along with the "national strategic capability of small British and French elements."<sup>90</sup> The underlying assumption was that, in the event of a Soviet attack, American strategic nuclear forces and British and French nuclear weapons would protect Western European countries.

In 1983, in a similarly unconvincing fashion, former Minister of External Affairs Flora MacDonald told the House of Commons that the Europeans had requested the deployment of cruise and Pershing missiles because they wanted to have "some defensive mechanism" to protect themselves. "As long as the people of the countries of western Europe feel that way," said MacDonald, "I feel that we as a member of NATO supporting them must agree to that kind of defensive system which, in this case, means the Cruise missile and the Pershing II." In effect, MacDonald incorrectly portrayed these weapons as systems capable of defending allied territory rather than as instruments of mass destruction that contributed to NATO's deterrent posture.<sup>91</sup>

The widespread inclination to regard the Alliance's nuclear and conventional weapons as fundamentally non-threatening led to the use of reassuring analogies to describe them. Charles Nixon, a former deputy minister of National Defence, likened Pershing and cruise missiles to a "comfort blanket,"<sup>92</sup> while the conventionally armed CF-104 aircraft was disparaged by the minister of National Defence, Leo Cadieux, and Cabinet colleague Bud Drury as "a pea shooter" and a "second-hand Cadillac."<sup>93</sup>

The assumption that Canada's own weapons were necessary and defensive prompted some Defenders to reason that the Alliance's nuclear and conventional deployments were a "measured response" to the enemy's initially threatening provocations. Thus, cruise missiles were presented as the Alliance's reluctant response to the Warsaw Pact's SS-20 intermediate range ballistic missiles.<sup>94</sup> Canada's contribution of frigates and submarines to the Alliance's Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW) strategy was deemed necessary on the grounds that the Soviet Union had already developed a significant submarine capability.<sup>95</sup> In hindsight, it was rationalized that a decision by Canada to develop its own stockpile of nuclear weapons would have been an appropriate response.<sup>96</sup>

There was a worrisome tendency among many Defenders, particularly in the 1950s and '60s, to rely on the Alliance's nuclear weapons to the point that their use was contemplated almost with equanimity.



In 1963, the Ad Hoc Defence Committee recommended that air defence weapons be armed with nuclear weapons for "policing" and "coastguard" duties because of their "improved cost-effectiveness."<sup>97</sup> And in 1968, a working group from the Departments of National Defence and External Affairs reasoned that, "in the field of air defence, Canada is likely to have a long-term requirement for nuclear weapons simply because they would provide the most effective defence in the event of attack."<sup>98</sup> Especially during the 1950s and '60s, decision-makers contemplated the use of nuclear weapons with little concern as to their possible effects. A prevailing assumption at that time, according to Lieutenant-General Charles Belzile, was that:

Nuclear weapons were still controllable. And they were, by and large, those that were being considered by the Canadian forces for arming some of their aircraft or arming the tips of some of the missiles or indeed some artillery shells which could be fractional yield nuclear weapons. We studied those things and we saw them as just another extension, if you want, of the available spectrum of weapons systems, to allow you to fight a war if you ever had to fight it. And we did not look at nuclear weapons with the same global unease that I think we all do today.<sup>99</sup>

By the 1970s and 1980s, not all Defenders regarded nuclear weapons as non-threatening. Many recognized that, to be credible, the weapons had to be seen as both threatening and usable; they realized that what mattered in signalling a deterrent message was not how the Alliance saw it, but how others would understand it. As J. Gilles Lamontagne, the minister of National Defence in 1983, pointed out: "The entire purpose of nuclear weapons is to deter aggression, to deter their use by others ... But there is a paradox in the strategy of deterrence which must be recognized. If nuclear weapons are to be useful to deter aggression, they must be credible. To be credible, there must be confidence, especially on the part of the opposition, that is the other side, that they will work."<sup>100</sup> Yet, despite recognizing that NATO's strategic and tactical nuclear weapons had to be seen as threatening to be credible, Defenders, by and large, tended to present Canada's own weapons systems as defensive. They assumed that Canadian weapons systems would only be used as part of a second-strike strategy. When questions were raised in the 1980s about whether the cruise missiles being tested in Canada could be used as offensive battlefield weapons in a limited nuclear war, high-level officials emphasized that "neither the air-launched nor the ground-launched cruise [missile] systems have the high speed capability required for a 'first-strike' weapon and are therefore exclusively retaliatory in character."<sup>101</sup> The cruise missile



was portrayed solely as a second-strike weapon. Later, critics charged that the so-called advanced cruise missile could be used as part of an offensive strategy, even though this missile was categorized in high-level discussions as an improved version of the slower, second-strike model. In fact, a high-level briefing note written in February 1983 entirely overlooked the stealth missile's potential as a first-strike weapon. According to this adviser, "future models of the cruise missile (e.g. 'the stealth cruise missile') are expected to incorporate technical improvements designed to make them less vulnerable to radar detection and therefore less likely to be shot down. These improvements form part of a continuing effort to improve the deterrent capability of us and NATO forces and will therefore enhance Canadian security."<sup>102</sup> Although questions were raised about the offensive capabilities of the stealth missile, many high-level decision-makers maintained that they would not be used unless deterrence failed or the enemy decided to strike first.

Finally, in keeping with the assumption that Canada's weapons were necessary and non-threatening, Defenders often assumed that technological advances in the nation's own weapons systems were acceptable. Thus, the new tactical nuclear weapons were widely conceived of as "a usable kind of weapon which limited damage."<sup>103</sup> The Alliance's cruise missile was initially conceptualized as relatively harmless and innocuous,<sup>104</sup> while Canada's maritime contribution to NATO's ASW strategy was conceived of as appropriate because it would solve the kinds of problems experienced during World War II and the Cuban missile crisis – specifically, problems relating to the protection of supply convoys travelling to Europe from North America.<sup>105</sup> In many such instances, Defenders were inclined to see reassuring similarities between different kinds of military equipment, and to place various sorts of weapons in the same non-threatening category. From their perspective, technological advances in our defence systems were both appropriate and warranted.

*Defenders believed deterrence doctrine was suitable and reliable*

Many influential decision-makers premised their support for maintaining or strengthening Canada's NATO commitments on the changing requirements of deterrence doctrine. Most Defenders expressed considerable faith in deterrence, a faith they retained as nuclear strategy evolved and technology advanced. Before 1957, most Defenders believed that credible deterrence should rely mainly on the United States' monopoly of ballistic nuclear missiles.<sup>106</sup> By the late 1950s, however, many Defenders assumed that deterrence doctrine



anti-bomber defence was required to protect the deterrent, and before the USSR had deployed a substantial missile force, this was no longer the case."<sup>114</sup> By 1983, however, many influential Canadian decision-makers assumed that, were it not for the Alliance's entire array of strategic, tactical, and conventional weapons systems, the stability of deterrence could be severely threatened. The Minister of National Defence explained in 1983: "We have no doubt that in doing what we do now, for example, flexible response, inter-continental missiles, short and long range nuclear force, what we used to call TNF, and also through our conventional forces we can create a credible deterrence. The minute, however, that our deterrent is no longer credible, we lose completely the effect of it. That could mean that you have to go to the horror of nuclear war or to submit to whatever the aggressor decides to do with you."<sup>115</sup>

Thus, in each decade, different kinds of commitments by Canada to NATO were deemed necessary to help ensure a credible deterrence posture. Indeed, some Canadian decision-makers at times supported one approach to deterrence strategy while NATO headquarters espoused another. For example, the Alliance's doctrine of "mutual assured destruction" was still widely accepted among Canadian decision-makers after it had been informally jettisoned by NATO's higher echelons in favour of a strategy of "flexible response." As the Ad Hoc Committee on Defence reported in 1963, many Canadians continued, mistakenly, to support the doctrine of massive retaliation and to support acquiring military capabilities that would contribute to the deterrence of all-out thermonuclear war: "[A common misconception widely held by many Canadians, including many alleged experts on defence] is that military capabilities which do not contribute to the deterrence of all-out thermonuclear war are essentially useless. This view, in fact, implies an extreme version of the Dulles-Radford doctrine of massive retaliation. It is a curious fact that this horrendous doctrine has secured an intellectual acceptance in Canada which it never secured in the United States."<sup>116</sup> Such different approaches to the problem of credible deterrence were the result of evolving ideas among NATO strategists about how to signal credibility and deal with advances in nuclear technology.<sup>117</sup> But the thinking of influential Canadian policy-makers was divergent as well. As Admiral Robert Falls (ret.), Chief of the Defence Staff from 1977 to 1980, later explained, ideas about how to ensure a credible deterrent posture in Europe changed even as tactical nuclear missiles were deployed in Germany:

Most of the weapons of mass destruction would have fallen, it seems to me, on German soil, and I think what they were trying to generate there, in



retrospect, was to get a little less emphasis on nuclear warfare and on the trip wire concept. In other words, it was a genuine desire to have a more deterrent posture I think ... And so, I think, probably, it was in trying to respond to Germany's concern that the Americans, and I think quite rightly, decided it was time to put more emphasis on conventional forces and therefore less reliance, no less numbers or anything else like that, heaven forbid, but less reliance on the nuclear trip wire aspects.<sup>118</sup>

While some Defenders changed their minds about what was necessary to signal a credible deterrent posture, others remained beholden to NATO's declared strategy until it eventually came to their attention that another permutation of the doctrine needed to be defended.<sup>119</sup> As Ross Campbell explains, each permutation of deterrence strategy seemed sensible at the time:

We've watched it [NATO strategy] evolve from trip wire and massive retaliation, in the days when we had total superiority over the Soviet Union, to other pragmatic adjustments that took place when they finally got the nuclear capability. All of a sudden we decided on graduated response, flexible response, which meant that there's no point in committing suicide. Let's develop a doctrine that is a little more realistic and that says we'll respond with the degree of force needed to restore the *status quo*. We won't attract a holocaust if we can help it. Well, you know you can laugh about this, in retrospect, but when you're at the peak of a Cold War, it is another matter and these policies look sensible. They look ridiculous in retrospect. At the time they looked very sensible because we didn't really know what was going to happen in the future.<sup>120</sup>

Over time, some Defenders came to believe nuclear deterrence was an appropriate and suitable strategy precisely because the Alliance never had to use its nuclear weapons. As Gilles Lamontagne, the minister of National Defence, explained in 1983: "Deterrence is not an attractive way of ensuring peace, but it has worked."<sup>121</sup> Certainly, for some Defenders, it was unthinkable to suggest that nuclear deterrence could fail, or that deterrence might not ensure peace in Europe. Charles Nixon, a former deputy minister of National Defence and a strong NATO Defender, recalled: "Trudeau would ask repeatedly: 'Is this going to be a short war or long war?' Immediately you respond to that question, you are lost because you accept war as being inevitable. As soon as I perceived this, when I was in the PCO, I advised the Prime Minister: 'You're asking the wrong question. If we get into any war, we have failed in the important thing, and that's to deter it.' So your question should be: 'What posture should we have to



deter war?"<sup>122</sup> To Nixon, and other Defenders, it was unthinkable that nuclear deterrence might fail to keep peace in Europe.

Defenders partly based their support for Canada's NATO commitments on the requirements of nuclear deterrence doctrine. Many also believed that, in order to ensure its reliability – that is, to prevent deterrence from failing – the Alliance had to ensure its conventional defences were credible and that NATO could prevail in a limited war. For these decision-makers, a credible defence system and possible victory in a limited war were conceivable and attainable objectives. It was widely accepted, for instance, that the Canadian Forces should prepare for war across the spectrum of conceivable scenarios, with particular attention to high-intensity warfare in Europe.<sup>123</sup> It was also assumed that NATO's conventional defences should be strengthened "to the point where the net deterrent, the combined deterrent effect, is credible again." As John Halstead, a former ambassador to NATO explained, it was thought that NATO's conventional arms buildup had to be sufficient to halt a Soviet attack and put the onus for the first-use of nuclear weapons on the Soviet Union.<sup>124</sup>

Besides focusing on a credible conventional defence, many Defenders also believed that, to prevent deterrence failure, an equivalent or superior military balance was required. Although not many Defenders steadfastly believed that superior forces were necessary to deter attack, it was generally assumed that "a military balance is essential in today's world to our own security and that of our allies."<sup>125</sup> In the words of James Taylor, former under-secretary of state for External Affairs and ambassador to NATO, a balanced combination of nuclear and conventional forces was necessary to ensure a credible deterrent:

The key words are, I think, stability and balance. You can maintain a balance at different levels, and we must try to maintain it at the lowest level we can arrange, but if it has to be maintained at a relatively high level, for reasons not of our seeking, then really you have to find the resources to do that. It does not mean that you have to maintain forces on a one for one basis. No one in NATO has ever argued that and NATO never has maintained forces on that basis. It simply means that you have to maintain some adequate combination of nuclear and conventional forces to constitute a credible deterrent.<sup>126</sup>

Placing their faith in nuclear and conventional postures based on deterrence doctrine often meant that Defenders tended to ignore or dismiss threatening scenarios that could not be averted by issuing a deterrent threat. The possibility of uncontrollable escalation in Europe leading to general nuclear war, for example, was only cursorily examined.<sup>127</sup> The chance of a minor conflict or border skirmish



escalating into a nuclear confrontation was also downplayed.<sup>128</sup> The possibility of accidental nuclear war was only briefly scrutinized.<sup>129</sup> The idea that there could be an armed conflict, even a war between members of the Alliance, was for the most part unthinkable.<sup>130</sup> Just as undeterrable threats involving harm to the environment, human rights violations in Eastern Europe, nuclear proliferation in the Third World, terrorism, or nuclear waste dumping, were seldom considered.<sup>131</sup> Based on both classified and declassified evidence, it seems that many defence decision-makers either ignored or dismissed scenarios that could not be averted by the threat of nuclear and conventional retaliation. In effect, little, if any, attention was accorded to alternative scenarios that could not be controlled by relying on deterrence. Instead, based on their faith in deterrence, Defenders pressed the government to contribute to NATO's various nuclear and conventional force postures.

### CONCLUSION

While there is no question that nearly all influential Canadian decision-makers believed that the USSR was a significant and salient threat, in many situations the concerns of high-level decision-makers about abandoning the allies or being abandoned by them took precedence over customary and traditional preoccupations with the Soviet Union. For this reason, I examined the assumptions of Defenders about abandonment first, before dealing in detail with their particular beliefs regarding the threat, the utility of nuclear and conventional weapons, and the merits of deterrence.

Defenders tended to believe that the consequences of neglecting the allies, or being ourselves abandoned, were best averted by maintaining, if not strengthening, Canada's established contributions of forces, equipment, and money to NATO. Defenders simultaneously projected a belief that the threat to the Alliance from the Soviet Union, the Communist camp, or the Warsaw Pact was aggressive and opportunistic. As they saw it, Canada and the Alliance's defence capabilities were necessary and non-threatening. And, as another important element of their worldview, Defenders tended to advocate maintaining, if not modernizing Canada's military commitments to NATO's deterrent posture, based on the belief that this doctrine continued to be suitable and reliable.

The main elements of this belief system impelled many influential decision-makers to support maintaining, if not strengthening, Canada's NATO commitments. During secret high-level debates, decision-makers were influenced by a variety of factors stemming from the



international system and their domestic environment. However, it was adherence to a distinctive belief system typical of Defenders that appeared to contribute significantly to the support for Canada's NATO commitments. As well, although many of the comments cited in this chapter were attributed to confidential sources between 1963 and 1987, it is clear that most influential defence decision-makers espoused many of the main elements of one belief system. They included Paul Martin, Sr., Paul Hellyer, Mitchell Sharp, Leo Cadieux, Marcel Cadieux, Ross Campbell, Robert Cameron, Robert Ford, John Halstead, Gordon Smith, James Francis, Jim Nutt, Alan Gotlieb, Arthur Menzies, James Taylor, General Jean Allard, General Charles Belzile, Charles Nixon, Gilles Lamontagne, Perrin Beatty, and Paul Dick. Paul Martin was minister of External Affairs between 1963 and 1968 under Prime Minister Lester Pearson, and the leader of the Government in the Senate and acting secretary of state for External Affairs under Prime Minister Trudeau. Martin, a taciturn yet strong NATO Defender, argued consistently in both Pearson's and Trudeau's Cabinets in favour of maintaining, if not strengthening, Canada's NATO commitments. Mitchell Sharp, as minister of Finance under Lester Pearson from 1965 to 1968 and minister of External Affairs under Prime Minister Trudeau from 1968 to 1974, proved to be an articulate and well-briefed NATO Defender. He consistently pressed other Cabinet ministers and senior advisers in his department to favour retaining or strengthening Canada's overseas stationed forces. Paul Hellyer, serving as Pearson's minister of National Defence between 1963 and 1967 and Trudeau's minister of Transport between 1968 and 1969, quickly became an astute and well-informed critic of the structure of the Canadian Forces. Hellyer favoured unification and a shift toward mobile, light-armed forces capable of being deployed in Canada and Europe. Yet in the final analysis, he generally sided with other Defenders in support of fulfilling Canada's nuclear and conventional commitments to NATO.

Between 1967 and 1970, Minister of National Defence Leo Cadieux worked with Canada's ambassador to NATO, Ross Campbell, to oppose cutbacks and the contemplated withdrawal of Canadian Forces from Europe. Although Cadieux and Campbell opposed the Trudeau government's announcement of a two-thirds cutback in April 1969, they were forced to defend the announcement to other NATO representatives. In letters, telegrams, and personal appeals (Cadieux even threatened resignation), they argued against the reduction and, in September 1969, Cadieux was able to announce that the reductions would constitute only half of the previous force, rather than the two-thirds decrease originally contemplated. Both parties



based their arguments on fundamentally the same underlying assumptions as other Defenders.

Among the senior advisers to Cabinet during this period, there were also a number of less influential, but stalwart, Defenders. Marcel Cadieux, under-secretary of state for External Affairs between 1964 and 1970, consistently perceived a salient threat from the Soviet Union, and was more concerned about the dangers of abandonment than the possible consequences of entrapment. (Cadieux wrote many of the internal memoranda and briefing notes for Mitchell Sharp in defence of Canada's overseas forces and its nuclear commitments.) Another influential decision-maker, Robert Cameron, rose through the ranks of the civil service in the 1960s to become head of NATO and the North American Division in Ottawa between 1969 and 1970, director general of the Bureau of Defence and Arms Control in 1970, and eventually assistant under-secretary of state for External Affairs in 1981. For nearly twenty years, Cameron exerted an influence on Canadian defence decision-making, and his early views generally reflected many of the commonly held beliefs of Defenders. John Halstead was also a vigorous defender of Canada's Alliance commitments. As the principal writer of the STAFEUR report in 1969, assistant and then deputy under-secretary of state for External Affairs during the 1970s, and ambassador to NATO between 1980 and 1982, Halstead worked diligently to defend Canada's link to Europe through established NATO commitments. Other influential civil servants in the Department of External Affairs such as Robert Ford, James Ross (J.S.) Francis, Alan Gottlieb, Jim Nutt, and Gordan Smith shared many of the typical assumptions of Defenders as well. They prepared many of the memoranda and briefing notes informing Cabinet ministers of the grounds for arguing in favour of Canada's NATO commitments. Briefly, Ford served as Canada's ambassador to Moscow between 1964 and 1980. Francis, who had joined the Department of External Affairs in 1954, rose to become director of the Defence Relations Division in 1983. Gottlieb, who joined the Department of External Affairs a few years later in 1957, served as an assistant undersecretary between 1967 and 1968, before moving to the new Department of Communications as deputy minister from 1968 to 1973. Between 1977 and 1981, he returned to External Affairs as under-secretary with a final stint as ambassador to Washington under both Liberal and Conservative prime ministers. Nutt, who joined the department in 1949, was named a counsellor in Washington in 1960, deputy under-secretary of state in 1977, and a consul general in New York in 1979. Smith, who wrote the original drafts of the 1971 White Paper on Defence, served as Canada's ambassador to NATO during the 1980s and eventually served as deputy minister of Foreign Affairs.



Because of access restrictions, it is difficult to discern the extent to which Defenders retained their influence during the 1978–89 period. The CIIPS transcripts indicate that policy-makers who espoused the convictions of typical Defenders during the mid- and late-1970s included Ambassadors James Taylor and Arthur Menzies, Generals Belzile and Allard, and Deputy Defence Minister Charles Nixon. The House of Commons transcripts seem to indicate that two Trudeau Cabinet ministers – Minister of National Defence Gilles Lamontagne and Minister of External Affairs Alan MacEachen – as well as two Mulroney ministers – Minister of National Defence Perrin Beatty and Associate Defence Minister Paul Dick – based their arguments on reasoning typical of Defenders. But as we move forward in time – specifically after 1978 – it becomes increasingly difficult to ascertain, first, who the most influential defence decision-makers were and, second, their respective underlying beliefs and assumptions during their time in power. It is premature, then, to say whether the belief systems of Defenders had a significant effect on defence policy-making after 1978.

Much of the available evidence nevertheless indicates that, between 1963 and 1978, the presence of a number of Defenders in the inner circles of defence decision-making contributed to the Pearson and Trudeau governments' support for select NATO commitments. This is not to say, that it was only their presence that accounted for the Pearson Cabinet's decision to fulfill its nuclear commitments while maintaining its other NATO commitments virtually unchanged between 1963 and 1968. Nor does it entirely explain the Trudeau government's eventual decision to remain in NATO and to reduce the Canadian Forces in Europe by half. A host of other factors contributed to these outcomes. There can be little question, however, that between 1963 and 1978 many of the beliefs typical of Defenders significantly influenced defence decision-making apropos Canada's NATO commitments.

This chapter shows, broadly speaking, that certain beliefs and assumptions played an important role at various times in Canada's defence decision-making with regard to its NATO commitments. Within the inner circles of decision-making, certain policy-makers advocated that Canada strengthen or maintain these commitments because of their own beliefs about the foreseeable consequences of abandonment, the nature and salience of the threat to the Alliance, and the utility of NATO's defence systems, not to mention the requirement that Canada help buttress deterrence strategy. The following chapter delineates some of the contrasting ideas and convictions that influenced high-level decision-making between 1963 and 1989.